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ABSTRACT

This study examined the current state of teacher motivation and job satisfaction, building upon previous research by substantially increasing the sample to 969 participants. Participants were predominantly white, female elementary, middle, and high school teachers. They responded to a Web-based survey that examined their overall level of job satisfaction as a teacher, whether they would choose to become a teacher again if starting all over in a new career, the extent to which teachers in general are motivated, and how many teachers they knew or worked with who were unmotivated. Data analysis indicated that 77 percent of teachers were satisfied with their jobs as teachers. Males were slightly more satisfied as teachers than females. Teachers early in their careers and near the end of their careers indicated the highest levels of job satisfaction. More teachers in their early 20s and 30s indicated a desire to enter the field of teaching again if given the opportunity. Males reported knowing significantly more unmotivated teachers than did females, and 23 percent of respondents reported knowing or working with more than 10 teachers they would classify as unmotivated. (SM)

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TEACHER MOTIVATION AND JOB SATISFACTION IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

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Abstract

This study attempted to explain the current state of affairs with respect to teacher motivation and job satisfaction. This study builds upon previous studies conducted by the researcher primarily by substantially increasing the sample (N = 969). Elementary, middle, and high school teachers were asked to respond to several sets of questions including their overall level of job satisfaction, extent to which teachers in general are motivated, and the motivational levels of various school- and nonschool-based factors and performance incentives. Results include overall summaries as well as summaries by various demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, ethnicity, age, years of experience, school location, and school level).

Teacher Motivation and Job Satisfaction in the New Millennium

Introduction

Generally speaking, a significant number of teachers are dissatisfied with the circumstances associated with their work, and have been for some time. A study conducted by the National Education Association revealed that 25% of the teachers responding to the study expressed dissatisfaction with their current jobs (Sweeney, 1981). Similarly, but more recently, Mertler (1992) reported that 23% of the elementary, middle, and high school teachers surveyed in his study were dissatisfied with their jobs. Furthermore, 34% of the teachers in that study reported that, if given the opportunity to choose a career again, they would *not* choose to enter the teaching profession. In a national survey of 1000 inservice teachers, 67 percent responded that they know teachers whom they believe are incompetent and should be fired. When asked to specify the number of teachers who should be fired, the average response was three (Turner, 1986). These findings and additional research seem to indicate that there exist motivation and satisfaction problems in the teaching profession. It is likely that many of these teachers are not incapable of performing well. Perhaps it is the case that many are *unwilling* to perform well; i.e., they are unmotivated, possibly as a result of their dissatisfaction with their chosen careers.

As does the study at hand, several previous studies have examined teachers' levels of satisfaction, as well as other issues related to that satisfaction. The results of these studies began appearing in academic journals in the 1960s. Due to the changes in American—as well as the global—society, however, this brief review will focus on more recent studies.

Somewhat similar to the overall results of teacher satisfaction reported by Sweeney (1981) and Mertler (1992), a study by the Perie & Baker (1997) reported an overall dissatisfaction rate of about 32%. In those earlier studies (e.g., Mertler, 1992), approximately one-third of teachers reported that they would *not* choose to become teachers if given the opportunity. Other studies have reported that 39% (King & Peart, as cited in McConaghy, 1993), 43% (Brunetti, 2001), and 34% (Perie & Baker, 1997) would *not* choose to become teachers.

Studies have also examined differences in satisfaction among subgroup populations. For example, several studies have concluded that female teachers report higher levels of job satisfaction than have their male counterparts (King & Peart, as cited in McConaghy, 1993; Ellis & Bernhardt, 1992). Finally, elementary teachers have reported higher satisfaction with their jobs than have secondary teachers (Perie & Baker, 1997; King & Peart, as cited in McConaghy, 1993; Ellis & Bernhardt, 1992).

Competent teaching professionals are being lost to a variety of other career fields. In addition, many teachers who have remained in the classroom have become apathetic toward the work they are charged to perform. Unfortunately, the individuals most effected by this crisis are their students. These students are being deprived of the

opportunity to learn from a high proportion of these teachers who have the potential to be competent and successful. The morale of teachers can have far-reaching implications for student learning, as well as the health of the teacher (Lumsden, 1998). It is crucial to gain a better understanding of the job satisfaction of teachers.

Purpose of the Study

This study attempted to explain the current state of affairs with respect to teacher motivation and job satisfaction. This study builds upon previous studies (e.g., Mertler, 1992) primarily by substantially increasing the sample (N = 969). Elementary, middle, and high school teachers were asked to respond to several sets of questions including their overall level of job satisfaction, extent to which teachers in general are motivated, and the motivational levels of various school- and nonschool-based factors and performance incentives.

Method

The data for this study were collected through the administration of a web-based survey of teacher motivation and job satisfaction (see Figure 1). The survey was administered during Fall, 2000. Responses were received from 969 elementary, middle, and high school teachers. One section of the survey asked teachers to rate several factors dealing with their perceptions of motivation and job satisfaction. Specifically, the questions asked of teachers included:

- *What is your overall level of satisfaction with your job as a teacher?*

- *If you had the opportunity to start over in a new career, would you choose to become a teacher?*
- *Generally speaking, do you believe that the teachers with whom you work are motivated?*
- *How many teachers that you know or work with would you classify as unmotivated?*

The results were then summarized for the total group (N = 969), as well as by demographic subgroups. Subgroup comparisons were accomplished using chi-square analyses (α = .05).

Insert Figure 1 about here

Results

All analyses were conducted using SPSS (v. 10.0). The sample (N = 969) of respondents consisted primarily of female teachers (80%). The vast majority of teachers responding were Caucasian (92%), followed by Asian Americans (2%), Hispanic Americans (2%), and African Americans (1%). The median age represented by these teachers fell into the category ranging from 41 to 45 years of age. The median years of teaching experience was 11 to 15 years. Nearly half (47%) of the teachers were currently teaching in suburban settings, followed by 30% in rural settings and 23% in urban settings. Finally, the majority (46%) of responding teachers were teaching at the senior high school level, followed by approximately one-fourth teaching at each the middle/junior high school level (28%) and elementary level (26%). The results of the

study are organized and presented by each of the four questions previously listed. Following the overall summaries for the total sample, subgroup comparisons will be discussed. A summary of significant results is presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Question #1: ***What is your overall level of satisfaction with your job as a teacher?***

Slightly more than three-fourths (77%) of the teachers responding to the survey indicated that they were satisfied with their jobs as teachers. There was no significant difference in the reported levels of job satisfaction between females and males, $\chi^2(1, N = 951) = 3.65$, $p = .06$, with 75% of females and 82% of males reporting satisfaction with their jobs.

Additionally, there were no significant differences in the distribution of responses for job satisfaction based on ethnicity of respondent, $\chi^2(4, N = 940) = 4.15$, $p = .39$. This may have been somewhat misleading, since three cells in the crosstabulation matrix had expected counts less than 5.

There was a statistically significant difference in the distribution of responses for job satisfaction based on the age of the respondent, $\chi^2(7, N = 957) = 24.63$, $p < .01$. Percentages of satisfied teachers in the age range from 26–30 years ($n = 103$ or 87%) and those 56 years or older ($n = 44$ or 86%) were substantially greater than the overall value

of 77%. Additionally, the percentage of teachers in the range of 31–35 years who indicated satisfaction with their jobs was substantially lower at 61% (n = 63).

There was a statistically significant difference in the distribution of responses for job satisfaction based on the number of years of teaching experience, $\chi^2(7, N = 963) = 20.30$, $p < .01$. Percentages of satisfied teachers with experience ranging from 1–5 years (n = 169 or 81%), from 21–25 years (n = 119 or 86%), and 31–35 years (n = 19 or 95%) were substantially greater than the overall value of 77%. Additionally, the percentage of teachers with experience in the range of 6–10 years who indicated satisfaction with their jobs was substantially lower at 69% (n = 121).

There was not a significant difference in reported job satisfaction between teachers in different school settings, $\chi^2(2, N = 955) = 4.24$, $p = .12$. Urban teachers (n = 158 or 72%), suburban teachers (n = 348 or 78%), and rural teachers (n = 227 or 79%) reported very similar levels of job satisfaction.

Finally, there was not a significant difference in reported job satisfaction between teachers at different school levels, $\chi^2(2, N = 955) = 5.03$, $p = .08$. Elementary teachers (n = 183 or 74%), middle/junior high teachers (n = 217 or 82%), and high school teachers (n = 332 or 77%) also reported very similar levels of job satisfaction.

Question #2: ***If you had the opportunity to start over in a new career, would you choose to become a teacher?***

More than one-third (37%) of all teachers surveyed indicated that, if given the opportunity to select a career again, they would not choose to become teachers. There was no significant difference in the decision to start over in a career of teaching between

females and males, $\chi^2(1, N = 934) = .01$, $p = .93$, with 63% of both females and males indicating that they would again choose to become teachers.

There was a statistically significant difference in the distribution of responses for starting over as a teacher based on ethnicity of respondent, $\chi^2(4, N = 929) = 12.74$, $p = .01$. This may have again been somewhat misleading, since one cell in the crosstabulation matrix had an expected count of less than 5.

There was a statistically significant difference in the distribution of responses for starting over in a teaching career based on the age of the respondent, $\chi^2(7, N = 940) = 18.12$, $p = .01$. Percentages of teachers indicating that they would *not* choose to enter a teaching career in the age range from 21–25 years ($n = 18$ or 29%) and those in the range from 31–35 ($n = 29$ or 28%) were substantially lower than the overall value of 37%. Additionally, the percentage of teachers in the range of 56 years or older who indicated that they would not choose teaching was substantially higher at 49% ($n = 25$).

There was no statistically significant difference in the distribution of responses for starting over in a teaching career based on the number of years of teaching experience, $\chi^2(7, N = 945) = 12.37$, $p = .09$. Although not significant, percentages of teachers with experience ranging from 16–20 years ($n = 54$ or 45%) and those with 31–35 years of experience ($n = 11$ or 55%) were substantially greater than the overall value of 37%.

There was not a significant difference between teachers in different school settings regarding a decision to start over in a teaching career, $\chi^2(2, N = 940) = 2.77$, $p = .87$. Urban teachers ($n = 81$ or 38%), suburban teachers ($n = 160$ or 36%), and rural

teachers (n = 105 or 37%) were very similar in their responses not to choose starting over in a teaching career.

Finally, there was not a significant difference in the reported decision to start over as a teacher between teachers at different school levels, $\chi^2(2, N = 937) = 3.11, p = .21$. Elementary teachers ($n$ = 95 or 39%), middle/junior high teachers (n = 101 or 39%), and high school teachers (n = 147 or 34%) were very similar in their responses not to choose starting over in a teaching career.

Question #3: ***Generally speaking, do you believe that the teachers with whom you work are motivated?***

Three-fourths (75%) of all teachers surveyed indicated that they believe that teachers in general are motivated. There was no significant difference in the belief that teachers are motivated between females and males, $\chi^2(1, N = 948) = .87, p = .35$, with 76% of females and 72% of males indicating that they believe that teachers are motivated.

There was no statistically significant difference in the distribution of responses for believing that teachers are motivated based on ethnicity of respondent, $\chi^2(4, N = 940) = 6.39, p = .17$. Although the rate of response for most ethnicities fell right around the overall rate of 75%, all (100%) Asian-Americans believe that teachers are motivated. Once again, three cells in the crosstabulation matrix had an expected counts of less than 5.

There was not a statistically significant difference in the distribution of responses for believing that teachers are motivated based on the age of the respondent, $\chi^2(7, N =$

954) = 11.25, p = .13. Percentages of teachers responding in the affirmative ranged from 68% to 82%.

There was no statistically significant difference in the distribution of responses for believing that teachers are motivated based on the number of years of teaching experience, $\chi^2(7, N = 959) = 6.36$, p = .50. Percentages of teachers responding in the affirmative ranged from 71% to 80%.

There was not a significant difference between teachers in different school settings regarding believing that teachers are motivated, $\chi^2(2, N = 951) = 1.65$, p = .44. Urban teachers (n = 159 or 73%), suburban teachers (n = 344 or 77%), and rural teachers (n = 215 or 75%) were very similar in their responses believing that teachers are motivated.

Finally, there was not a significant difference in believing that teachers are motivated between teachers at different school levels, $\chi^2(2, N = 951) = 3.75$, p = .15. Elementary teachers (n = 196 or 80%), middle/junior high teachers (n = 193 or 73%), and high school teachers (n = 325 or 74%) were very similar in their responses believing that teachers are motivated.

Question #4: ***How many teachers that you know or work with would you classify as unmotivated?***

When asked to indicate the number of teachers they know or with whom they work that they would classify as unmotivated, the median response was 5–6 teachers. Overall, 25% of teachers indicated that they knew 1–2, 22% indicated 3–4, and another 15% indicated 5–6 teachers. Shockingly, nearly another fourth (23%) indicated that they

knew or worked with *more than 10 teachers* they would classify as unmotivated. There was a significant difference in the number of teachers that are unmotivated between females and males, $\chi^2(5, N = 940) = 16.12$, $p < .01$, with males reporting that they knew significantly more unmotivated teachers than female.

There was a significant difference between teachers in different school settings with respect to the number of unmotivated teachers they knew, $\chi^2(10, N = 947) = 21.79$, $p = .02$. Additionally, there was a significant difference between teachers at different school levels regarding the number of unmotivated teachers they knew, $\chi^2(10, N = 944) = 32.93$, $p < .01$.

Finally, chi-square analyses have not been reported for the number of unmotivated teachers by ethnicity, age of respondent, and years of teaching experience due to high numbers of cells with low expected frequencies.

Discussion

The rate of dissatisfaction with the job of teaching (23%) in this study was quite similar to previous studies (Mertler, 1992; Sweeney, 1981). Although not statistically significant—and somewhat contradictory to previous findings—males reported a higher level of job satisfaction than did females. Teachers early in their careers as well as those nearing the end of their careers indicated higher levels of job satisfaction than did teachers who were in the middle of their careers. A greater proportion of teachers in their early 20s and early 30s indicated a desire to again enter the teaching profession if

given the opportunity. Finally, males reported knowing significantly more unmotivated teachers than did females.

Although evidence seems to support the fact that teachers are generally satisfied with their jobs, also obvious is the fact that numerous teachers are dissatisfied. Perhaps a fact more important to consider is the incredible number of students with whom these dissatisfied teachers come in contact on a daily basis. In this study alone, 23% (or 223 teachers) reported that they are dissatisfied with teaching. Imagine the number of students that those 223 teachers are responsible for each year, or throughout their careers! We can only assume that the students of these classroom teachers are not receiving the highest quality education. We, in the field of education, must make attempts to improve the levels of motivation—and ultimately the levels of satisfaction—of our classroom teachers.

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Figure 1

The *Teacher Motivation and Job Satisfaction* Web-Based Survey

Welcome...and thank you for taking a few minutes to complete...

The Teacher Motivation and Job Satisfaction Survey

DIRECTIONS: For each item, please indicate your response by clicking on the appropriate button. When you have finished, click on the ***SUBMIT*** button at the bottom of the page to send your responses.

QUESTION NO.	QUESTION	VERY DISSATISFIED	SOMEWHAT DISSATISFIED	SOMEWHAT SATISFIED	VERY SATISFIED
1.	What is your overall level of satisfaction with your job as a teacher?	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○

QUESTION NO.	QUESTION	YES	NO
2.	If you had the opportunity to start over in a new career, would you choose to become a teacher?	1 ○	2 ○

QUESTION NO.	QUESTION	YES	NO
3.	Generally speaking, do you believe that the teachers with whom you work are motivated?	1 ○	2 ○

QUESTION NO.	QUESTION	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9-10	More than 10
4.	How many teachers that you know or work with would you classify as unmotivated?	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○

5. On the following 6-point scale, indicate the degree to which each of the following serve as a motivating factor or an unmotivating factor for teachers.

QUESTION NO.	QUESTION	HIGHLY UNMOTIVATING	.....	.....	.....	.....	HIGHLY MOTIVATING
5a.	recognition (e.g., receiving praise from administrators, parents, students, or others)	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
5b.	potential for professional growth (e.g., possibility of improving one's own professional skills)	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
5c.	supervision by superiors (e.g., overall competence of superiors)	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
5d.	interpersonal relationships with colleagues (e.g., interaction with other teachers)	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
5e.	salary (e.g., financial compensation)	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
5f.	job security (e.g., tenure)	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
5g.	status (e.g., professional status of teaching)	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
5h.	interpersonal relationships with administrators (e.g., interaction with administrators)	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
5i.	sense of achievement (e.g., experiencing success)	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
5j.	working conditions (e.g., building conditions, amount of work, facilities available)	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
5k.	district policies (e.g., overall effects of the district as an organization)	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
5l.	teacher evaluation (e.g., appraisal of classroom instruction by evaluator)	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○

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5m.	responsibility (e.g., autonomy, authority and responsibility for own work)	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
5n.	potential for advancement (e.g., possibility of assuming different positions in the profession)	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
5o.	work itself (e.g., aspects associated with the tasks of teaching)	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
5p.	factors in personal life (e.g., effects of teaching on one's personal life)	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
5q.	interpersonal relationships with students (e.g., interaction with students)	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
5r.	sense of accountability (e.g., being held directly responsible for student learning)	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○

6. On the following 6-point scale, indicate the degree to which each of the following items serve as a motivating factor or an unmotivating factor for teachers.

QUESTION NO.	QUESTION	HIGHLY UNMOTIVATING	.....	.....	.....	.....	HIGHLY MOTIVATING
6a.	a one-time monetary award (supplemental to the step increase)	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
6b.	being selected as "Teacher of the Year" in the district	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
6c.	an instructional workshop offered by the district for a fee	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
6d.	having students thank a teacher for aiding in the understanding of a difficult concept	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
6e.	an instructional workshop offered and paid for by the district	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
6f.	being given the opportunity to participate in teacher projects (e.g., research, curriculum development)	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
6g.	early retirement/contract buy-out	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
6h.	observing vast improvement in the achievement levels of one's students since the beginning of the year	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
6i.	being awarded a plaque by students	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
6j.	being permitted to purchase additional equipment and supplies for the classroom	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○

QUESTION NO.	QUESTION	FEMALE	MALE
7.	What is your gender?	1 ○	2 ○

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QUESTION NO.	QUESTION	AFRICAN AMERICAN	ASIAN AMERICAN	CAUCASIAN	HISPANIC AMERICAN	OTHER
8.	What is your ethnicity?	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○

QUESTION NO.	QUESTION	21-25 YEARS	26-30 YEARS	31-35 YEARS	36-40 YEARS	41-45 YEARS	46-50 YEARS	51-55 YEARS	56 YEARS OR OLDER
9.	What is your age?	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○

QUESTION NO.	QUESTION	1-5 YEARS	6-10 YEARS	11-15 YEARS	16-20 YEARS	21-25 YEARS	26-30 YEARS	31-35 YEARS	36 YEARS OR MORE
10.	Including the current school year, how many years of teaching experience do you have?	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○

QUESTION NO.	QUESTION	URBAN	SUBURBAN	RURAL
11.	Which best describes your current school setting?	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○

QUESTION NO.	QUESTION	ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	MIDDLE/JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL	HIGH SCHOOL
12.	Which best describes your current school level?	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○

Submit Survey

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Thank you for participating in this research study.

If you have questions or comments about this survey, please feel free to contact me...

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Table 1

Summary of Significant Chi-Square Results

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	χ^2 Value	Probability Value
Satisfied with job?	Age	24.63	<.01
	Years of experience	20.30	<.01
Start over as teacher?	Ethnicity	12.74	.01
	Age	18.12	.01
Number of teachers unmotivated?	Gender	16.12	<.01
	School setting	21.79	.02
	School level	32.93	<.01